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INAUGURAL ADDRESS

OF THE

MAD RIVER VALLEY PIONEER

AND HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Delivered at its organization

May 2, 1870

By the Rev. A. H. Bassett

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Springfield, Ohio

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MAD RIVER VALLEY PIONEER.

Vol. 1.

SPRINGFIELD, OHIO, MAY 1870.

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INAUGURAL ADDRESS

OF THE

Mad River Valley Pioneer and Historical
Association,

Delivered at its Organization May 2, 1870,

BY THE REV. A. H. BASSETT.

MR. PRESIDENT: To rescue from oblivion interesting facts and important information, would seem a duty which we owe to those who come after us. The present is indebted to the past; so the present should provide for the future. To-day has the benefit of yesterday's observations and experiences; so should to-day preserve and carry forward its accumulated information for the benefit of to-morrow.

Our American continent, which we are wont to term our Western World, is eminently a land of rapid development and marvelous progress. Our forefathers and foremothers were men and women of great toil, and patience, and endurance, and perseverance. They began at the sterile Plymouth Rock, making it a fruitful field. Then, they erected there a State, diminutive in size, but of mammoth enterprises, and a very empire in resources and population. Then they proceeded to found, and build, and people State after State in their Westward progress, not stopping for mountain barriers or for savage opposition. As they advanced, they had to penetrate vast forests and traverse great mountain ranges, with or without roads, and with or without teams, carrying fire arms to secure game for their sustenance, and to protect themselves from savage assaults. They constructed floats for crossing our great rivers, and even for navigating them for many hundreds of miles (downwards).

Selecting the sites for their dwellings and for their prospective towns, they wielded the echoing ax to fell the timbers of the dense woodlands, and constructed substantial but rude dwellings of primitive materials. The labor, and hardship, and exposure they went through would to us seem incalculable, as inendurable; but they heeded it not. Their methods, their experiences, their sufferings, their exploits, we have loved to hear them relate. But alas! many of them have passed away. And again, alas! many of them have left no record of their thrilling story, of their eventful and adventurous life. Of our own city, within a very few months or years, the following named venerable citizens have taken their departure: Col. Werden, Col. Bacon, Gen. Anthony, Gen. Mason, Judge Torbert, Dr. Hendershott, Squire Spining, Father Killis,

Father Barnett, Father Schindler, Father Watkins, and a score—it may be scores—of others.

But, it is yet fortunate that some of the fathers are still with us. We have yet amongst us honored citizens, whose memories are rich in pioneer associations, who have lively remembrances of the primitive and backwoods experiences. If we have not living, old physicians, who used to *click* the spring lance, and bleed the patient in every fever, we have some old ministers, as Bishop Morris and Dr. Brown, who used to be pioneer itinerants, at half paid allowance, (not to say salary), which would not to-day keep our clergymen in books and periodicals. If we have not judges who used to preside in log court houses, or lawyers who used to collect their fees in coon skins and maple sugar, we have those of different professions who used to attend school (if at all,) in houses of unhewn logs, with puncheon floors, mud chimneys, and window-lights of greased paper. We have among us men who were soldiers in the war of 1812, who used gun-flints, and carried punk and a tinder-box for striking fire; for percussion caps and friction matches were unknown. We have still among us many who used to be happy in log cabin homes; who used to hunt deer and wild turkeys for provisions; who used to thresh their grain and shell their corn by hand, beat it to a degree of fineness in a log mortar, with a stone pestle. The generation has not passed away, of men who knew no reaper but the sickle, no mower but the scythe, no threshing machine but the flail, no cider mill but the home-made press. The men are here who saw nearly if not quite the first steam-boat on the Ohio, who witnessed the beginning of our canals, our McAdamized roads, our railways, and our telegraphs. Yes, we have yet pioneers in our midst, whose memories, as we have said, are rich in stories of the past, filled to the brim with incidents and experiences of thrilling interest. Then, whilst we yet have them amongst us, let us as opportunity may serve, gather around them, and listen to their simple and unvarnished narrative, for it will have the eloquence of personal realization.

Here, then, is one of the objects of this Association: We would supply a sensible lack, i.e. one means of public entertainment which has not yet been brought before our community—we have no lack of concerts, festivals, fairs or picnics. We are amply favored with the visits of the menagerie, the circus troupe, the dramatic corps, the minstrel band. And our graver and more sensible courses of popular lectures furnish literary entertainment, and sometimes amusing pastime. But, Mr. Presi-

dent, to make up the variety, we need a Pioneer Association, to furnish us the entertainment of an occasional evening in the personal recitals of such as can tell us about the past of our now well fixed and prosperous country, and State and city. The pioneers are passing away. Let us ask them to relate to us their story before they go hence. And let us make reasonable haste to do this, as their time may be short.

Another object of this Association is, to answer the purpose of a Historical Society, to gather facts, documents and relics, for preservation, that we may leave intelligible and useful records for the inspection and benefit of coming generations.

We have evidence that the ancients, from the remotest ages, used to erect monuments, to perpetuate the knowledge of events. And as they knew not the printing art, they were accustomed to engrave their historic facts upon the enduring marble. A great many ancient records in this form are extant, some in a wonderful state of preservation. And modern oriental researches are continually bringing to light additional marble chapters of this ancient history. All this evidences the wisest forethought in the men of the primal ages. It seems that they even thought of us, though then unborn, and did us the great favor to send down to us these simple, primitive records. The value now placed upon them is inestimable.

Grateful, then, to the ancients for their forethought towards us, should we not learn from them, with our tenfold increased advantages, to convey records forward to posterity. Mr. President, the very winds are daily sweeping away many leaves of important information, which should be snatched, as it were from destruction, and laid away for future inspection and use. And for what we may do, in this regard, the men and women of hereafter, whom you and I may not live to see, will rise up and call us blest I.

Then, let us make the beginning of a historical collection; books, papers, manuscripts, fragments, relics, antiquities, curiosities, or what not; pertaining to the history of our country; and its accumulations will soon produce archives which will do credit to our city and county, and be of unending benefit to coming generations.

In the principal counties throughout the State, Pioneer Associations have been formed, and are in active operation—wide awake in the matter. Let us not be behind the times. Do we not consider Clarke county one of the best? Are we not wont to regard Springfield the very garden spot of Ohio? Would we not scorn to fall behind in intelligence, or in enterprise in any worthy respect? We think we have cause to feel proud of our improvements and of our achievements in mechanical and manufacturing enterprises. It is indeed said that we boast much of our progress, and of the extensive amount of our industrial products sent abroad to all quarters under heaven. This is well. Let no man stop us of this boasting. But, Mr. President, we have been lacking of one cause of boasting. Up to this time it has been said that Clarke county has no Pioneer Association, no Antiquarian Society, no His-

torical Club. Please, sir, let us have an end to this. Never again, after to-day, let such a thing be said of Clarke county. I trust you will so decide, and that this community will sustain you with its hearty amen, and its prompt co-operation.

Mr. President: I need not ask, are you aware, are our people generally aware, that Clark County, of which we are citizens, contains some historical localities of rare interest. We have just at hand, the famed *Mad River*. I have been curious to learn, and have made considerable search to ascertain the origin of this unique name. You may smile at my simplicity, as I confess that for many years I had an idea that this river derived its name from the appellation given to Gen. Anthony Wayne, as *Mad River Valley* was partly the theater of his important operations. On account of his characteristics of uncommon daring and bravery, he received the epithet *Mad Anthony*. But, I have had to relinquish this supposition, so long entertained, for my researches have brought to light but one explanation—that given by Timothy Flint, in one of his volumes of *Western History*. Flint represents *Mad River* as thus named because of the *furious* character of its current! Now, it so happens that I have not traveled extensively enough up and down the stream to discover its furious portions. It has usually appeared quite calm and unassuming when I have met with it. Hence, I could not say that it is rightly named. By the way, Mr. President, you have an honored position in one of the *Banks* of the *Mad River*. Its basis is rock, and its front marble. I have called in sometimes in this cliff in the River Bank, but to me it never seemed a *Mad House*. So, upon the whole, I apprehend the name of our river is a misnomer.

Long before the settlement by whites, one hundred years ago, and how much longer ago I presume no living man knoweth, there was an Indian town called *Piqua*, situated on the opposite side of *Mad River*, five or more miles below this point. I think this was the original *Piqua*, as may appear presently. The name (*Piqua*), in the Shawnee is said to signify, “a man that sprang up out of the ashes.” Now, some of us white men may have had such antecedents as this, and we might not relish being reminded of it. This *Piqua*, on *Mad River*, was a place of much consequence for the time, extending for more than three miles up and down the margin of the river. Its reputation as headquarters of the Shawnee tribe was known far abroad. And even before the settlement of Ohio, as long ago as 1780, an army of a thousand men was raised in Kentucky, and, under command of General George Rogers Clark, came out through the wilderness (for there was no white settlement even at Cincinnati), all the way to the *Piqua* town, on *Mad River*, to subdue and destroy it. On their way they came to old *Chillicothe* town, on the Little *Miami*, which was at the spot you now call *Oldtown*, a little this side of *Xenia*. (But there was then no *Xenia*,

mind you.) Apprised of their approach, the Indians had not only abandoned the place, but had set fire to their houses, and nearly all were consumed. The army pursued the Indian road from Chillicothe across to Piqua, probably passing near where Enon now stands. You know there is an ancient mound in that vicinity. To be brief—Piqua and its fort were destroyed. And the army, having fulfilled its mission, retraced its steps to Kentucky, and was forthwith disbanded. Just here observe, we are honoring the memory of Gen. G. R. Clark, who led this army, by calling after him the name of our county.

Meanwhile, it seems the Indians were dispersed from old Piqua, and went over to the Great Miami, and built another Piqua, which still survives, and the white man's edition of it they now call *City*.

About the year 1768 or 1769, little more than a hundred years ago—at Piqua town on Mad River, Tecumseh was born. He must have been a half grown lad, at the time his native town was destroyed; old enough however to be an observer of the sad scene, and to receive his impressions of the affair. It was natural, if not meritorious, in him, that he should be loyal to his nation, and strive to repel the encroachments of the whites. He grew to be a leading and influential chief and warrior. It is said that he traveled so extensively as to visit all the tribes east of the Mississippi, from Mackinaw to Georgia, to endeavor to unite all in a planned combination against the American Government. It seems that in the Indian style he was a natural orator, and sometimes wielded a marked power with his eloquence. But his plans were foiled, and had to be given up. In the year 1812, he was induced to become an ally of the British army. They made him a Brigadier general, and it is said he was in every battle in the North-west, except that of Tippecanoe, until he fell in the battle of the Thames, 1813, as was believed from a pistol shot from the hand of Richard M. Johnson. Gen. Tecumseh, though an Indian, and though he did not please Gen. Harrison, had his noble traits of character. It is particularly represented that he behaved with great humanity towards our men at the siege of Fort Meigs. When General Procter had abandoned the American prisoners to the ferocity and tomahawks of the savages, our great Indian chief, Tecumseh, came rushing in, and exerted his authority to arrest the massacre; and meeting a Chippewa chief, who would not desist for persuasion or threats, he buried his tomahawk in his head. Tecumseh fell in his prime—in his 44th year. Now, be it remembered, that this Tecumseh, celebrated throughout two great nations, besides his own people, had his birthplace here on Mad river, in our very vicinity. If we are not proud of this association of ideas, I apprehend we have no cause to be ashamed of it. I know not why we have not given his name to something, if it were only a way station or a back street. We have certainly immortalized the names of some meaner white men. I have passed through

important towns named Tecumseh in other States, hundreds of miles from the birthplace of the warrior. He was certainly a shrewd and brave man; and, viewed from his standpoint, was a man of principle. Could he rise from the dead, and appear among us, I apprehend we would have to give him amnesty, though a red man, and I think he would be a pretty popular fellow. Had I assurance of a second, I would move that we yet set up the name of Tecumseh somewhere in Clarke county.

But, pardon me, Mr. President, I have gone beyond my intention when I set out. I had no purpose to give a sketch of Tecumseh, or of our local history. Here is a rich theme for some gentleman more competent than your present speaker. I desired it should be suggested to this community, as many may not be aware of it, that Clarke county, Ohio, is rich in historical associations. And, this being the case, it is a lack which is not creditable to us that we have in existence no organization of the character of a Pioneer, or Antiquarian, or Historical society. I am gratified to know, that we have among us, intelligent and honored citizens, who have lived nearly or quite all their lives in this section, some who were living in this valley whilst Tecumseh was yet living, and whilst his tribe was yet residing, or at least wandering in Ohio, and not far distant. And I do not despair of finding out some one of our old settlers who have actually seen Tecumseh. The inquiry would not be an unworthy one. My old friend John A. Crain, of Bethel township, (I wish it were called Tecumseh), who was postmaster in Springfield, thirty years ago, informs me that he was born on the very farm where he now has his home, more than half a century ago, and this is at the very locality of old Piqua town. Had I not in time past repeatedly visited the place, I should certainly now desire to make an excursion to look upon the famed spot. Through the kindness of a member of the family of Mr. C., I am furnished with some ancient relics from the battle ground of old Piqua. He informs me also, as I trust I may use the freedom to mention, that General J. W. Keifer was also born in the same vicinity; and the Hon. Samuel Shellabarger, too, had his birthplace but a short distance from there on the opposite side of the river. These gentlemen, I doubt not, would be able to communicate many circumstances of interest, historical, or, at least, traditional, connected with the old Piqua locality. Many other citizens, doubtless, are also possessed of facts and incidents, historical or antiquarian, pertaining to the Mad River Valley or some other portion of the State. I trust these will become enlisted in behalf of this Association, and will be induced to give us hereafter their views and their narrations for the entertainment of the public.

Mr. President. I pray you that you go not back from this movement. Let it be a success and a perpetuity. And let us not forget that all should be done in God's fear, and to the glory of His name.

ANECDOCE OF TECUMSEH.

In the autumn of 1807 a white man by the name of Myers was killed a few miles west of where the town of Urbana now stands, by some straggling Indians. This murder, taken in connection with the assembling of the Indians under Tecumseh and the Prophet, created a great alarm on the frontier, and actually induced many families to remove back to Kentucky, from whence they had emigrated. A demand was made by the whites upon these two brothers for the Indians who had committed the murder. They denied that it was done by their party, or with their knowledge, and declared that they did not even know who the murderers were. The alarm continued, and some companies of militia were called out. It was finally agreed that a council should be held on the subject in Springfield, for the purpose of quieting the settlements. Gen. Whiteman, Maj. Moore, Capt. Ward, and one or two others, acted as commissioners on the part of the whites. Two parties of Indians attended the council: one from the north, in charge of McPherson; the other, consisting of sixty or seventy, came from the neighborhood of Fort Wayne, under the charge of Tecumseh. Roundhead, Blackfish and several other chiefs were also present.

There were no friendly feelings between these two parties, and each was willing that the blame of the murder should be fixed upon the other. The party under McPherson, in compliance with the wishes of the commissioners, left their arms a few miles from Springfield. Tecumseh and his party refused to attend the council, unless permitted to retain their arms. After the conference was opened, it being held in a maple grove, a little

north of where Werden's hotel now stands, the commissioners, fearing some violence, made another effort to induce Tecumseh to lay aside his arms. This he again refused, saying in reply that his tomahawk was also his pipe, and that he might wish to use it in that capacity before their business was closed. At this time a tall, lank-sided Pennsylvanian, who was standing among the spectators, and who perhaps had no love for the shining tomahawk of the self-willed chief, cautiously approached and handed him an old long stemmed dirty looking earthen pipe; intimating that if Tecumseh would deliver up the fearful tomahawk, he might smoke the aforesaid pipe. The chief took it between his thumb and finger, held it up, looked at it for a moment, then at the owner, who was gradually receding from the point of danger, and immediately threw it, with an indignant sneer, over his head into the bushes. The commissioners yielded the point and proceeded to business.

After a full and patient inquiry into the facts of the case, it appeared that the murder of Myers was the act of an individual, and not justly chargeable upon either party of the Indians. Several speeches were made by the chiefs, but Tecumseh was the principal speaker. He gave a full explanation of the views of the Prophet and himself, in calling around them a band of Indians—disavowed all hostile intentions towards the United States, and denied that he or those under his control had committed any aggressions upon the whites. His manner, when speaking, was animated, fluent and rapid, and made a strong impression upon those present. The council terminated. In the course of it the two hostile parties became reconciled to each other, and quiet was restored to the frontier.—*Drake's Tecumseh.*

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